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ABSTRACT

A disproportionate number of Hispanic/LEP students are leaving school in the ninth grade. Although dropout programs exist in Florida county school districts, none addressed the special language and culture difficulties, often coupled with socioeconomic problems, of these students. This practicum was designed to reduce the number of Hispanic/LEP school dropouts in one county school district and to support the students staying in an alternative program. The problem is described and documented. Various strategies were researched; counseling to improve student self-esteem and motivation was the final primary focus of the intervention in practice. Exploring the arts and careers was also utilized as a strategy. Implementation occurred in two high schools with 64 ninth-grade students. Throughout one school year, a total of four different groups were met with for different periods of time. Students were measured for improvement in grade promotion, staying in an alternative program, and reading and writing English. All four outcomes were met. Processes and results are discussed; nine recommendations are provided for developing the program. (Contains 51 references.) (Author/EMK)

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ED 428 308

Decreasing Early School Withdrawal and Retention of Hispanic and Other Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students Through Counseling and Arts/Career Exploration

by

Carmen M. Matos
Cluster 67

A Practicum II Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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APPROVAL PAGE

This practicum took place as described.

Verifier: Carmen Sorondo

Supervisor, Programs for Limited English Proficient Students

Tampa, Florida

September 30, 1998

This practicum report was submitted by Carmen M. Matos under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

Date of Final Approval of Report

Barbara Christina, Ed.D., Advisor

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Finally, the writer salutes the ninth grade Hispanic students who came to the meetings and struggled against many obstacles to remain in school. Their struggle is far from over, so she wishes them Buena Suerte! with all her heart.

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Abstract

Decreasing Early Scool Withdrawal and Retention of Hispanic and Other Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students Through Counseling and Arts/Career Exploration. Matos, Carmen M., 1998: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Dropouts/ High School/Ninth Grade/School Leavers/Hispanic students/LEP/ Counseling/Arts Therapies/Careers/Mexican-American/At-risk.

This practicum was designed to reduce the number of Hispanic/LEP school dropouts and to support the students staying in an alternative program. Many diverse strategies were researched. Counseling to improve student self-esteem and motivation was the final primary focus of the intervention in practice. Exploring the arts and careers was also utilized as a strategy. Implementation occurred in two high schools with 64 ninth grade students.

Over one school year, the writer met with a total of four different groups for different periods of time. Students were measured for improvement in grade promotion, staying in an alternative program, and reading/writing English.

All four of the outcomes were met. In addition, much was learned about this population through counseling and observation.

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PRACTICUM II

Chapter I: Introduction

Description of Community

The writer's clients are students from the Hispanic community of a large southeastern county. The Hispanic community has been established for many years, but the majority of families, particularly recent immigrants, have low earnings. In the county, 25.5% of Hispanic families are considered to be living in poverty. Hispanic annual per capita income was found to be $7,705. The income for lower socioeconimic status (SES) Hispanic families was derived mostly from Food Stamps, Assistance to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and Social Security (SSI). The majority of homes are headed by single mothers who were unemployed (Children's Board, 1990).

It is difficult for parents and guardians of immigrant students in this community to improve their low socioeconomic situation. Many parents have obstacles to obtaining a job and helping their children in school. The majority of parents do not own a car. Most of these parents also do not have a high school education and lack job skills. They have difficulty communicating with the teachers and school staff. In this population, 50.9% of families were reported as limited in English proficiency

(LEP) (Children's Board, 1990). Some are illiterate in their native language of Spanish. Overall, the majority of Hispanic families live with limited resources, making it difficult to achieve socioeconomic progress.

Description of Work Setting

The writer's work setting is a large county school system, with many urban inner-city schools. With 160 schools, the district is the third largest in the state and twelfth largest in the nation. The writer provides bilingual school social work services to 45 inner city schools, including 29 elementary schools, 7 junior high schools, 5 high schools, 3 exceptional centers, and 1 adult center. Total enrollment in the district is approximately 132,000 students, of which about 12,000 are considered LEP. The county's LEP students represent 60 different languages, though more than 90 percent are native Spanish speakers.

Writer's Role

The writer is a Bilingual School Social Worker (BSSW) serving LEP students referred to her for evaluation by school-based, English-speaking social workers. The BSSW is especially qualified for this work through both life experience and education. She is one of three BSSWs, and the only one who is bicultural -- born in Puerto Rico and raised in both the United States and Puerto Rico. She holds an M.A. in Vocational Counseling and a Bachelor of Social

Work. Students are referred for evaluation due to either inadequate academic achievement, behavioral problems, or both.

The BSSW works with the school guidance counselor and classroom teacher when a student is referred for an evaluation (Social Developmental History). The social worker obtains information about the student's academic strengths and weaknesses from the classroom teacher. This information includes the student's functioning level (below, at, or above grade level), any language barrier, difficulties completing classwork, interest in learning, and if the student is a slow learner. The teacher also informs the social worker about student behavioral problems including poor school attendance or motivation, frustration level and causes, self-esteem, and attitude toward peers and authority figures. The teacher identifies specific areas of difficulty that are having a negative impact on the student's academic and/or social progress. The classroom teacher relates those techniques that have been used successfully to assist the student in improving his/her academic deficits and behavioral problems.

The BSSW provides assessment and evaluation of Hispanic LEP students referred for academic and behavioral problems. Each evaluation conducted by the BSSW has several steps and results in a Social Developmental and Medical History of the referred student. The BSSW talks with the referring teacher about the student's behavior and academic problems indicated

on the referral. She then observes the Hispanic student in a regular classroom setting and sometimes also at the student's home. The BSSW usually interviews these students in their primary language of Spanish, but sometimes in both Spanish and English. The main focus during interviews is to obtain the following information: Does the student see him/herself as limited in English? Does the student perceive him/herself as having academic and/or behavioral problems at school, such as with classwork and making friends in the classroom? Student interviews provide the BSSW with added insight into any academic and behavioral deficits.

The BSSW interviews each student's parent(s) or guardian(s) in a home visit. The overwhelming majority of the parents and guardians are limited in English, so these interviews are invariably conducted in Spanish. The bilingual school social worker acts as a link between the school and the family, and often between the family and community and state social services. She informs parents and guardians of their children's academic and behavioral needs, as well as how they can interact with the school system. In this interaction, the BSSW facilitates mutual understanding regarding significant cultural factors which impact upon immigrant student adjustment to a new school setting.

Chapter II: Study of the Problem

Problem Statement

The problem to be solved in this practicum was that Hispanic Limited English Proficient students in the ninth grade were withdrawing early from school. A disproportionately high number of Hispanic/LEP students were leaving middle and high school before graduation or being referred to alternative programs aimed at dropout prevention. Although a number of dropout programs existed in the county school district, and each specifically permited LEP student referral and enrollment, none addressed the special language and culture difficulties, often coupled with socioeconomic problems, of these students.

Problem Description

There is a significant number of Hispanic LEP middle and high school (grades 7-12) early school leavers (dropouts) and habitual truants in the county. Roughly one third of all Hispanic students in the state leave school without graduating with a high school diploma. The problem is also significant nationally. About 27.5% of Hispanics ages 16-24 do not complete high school, according to U.S. Department of Education figures. According to county LEP supervisor, Hispanic school dropouts in the county are especially at risk of being recruited into gangs (personal

communication, May 5, 1997). There is a need to identify these high risk students who are showing early signs of anti-social behavior and apply interventions for specific problems with literacy and general school work.

Problem Documentation

Four years of teacher referrals, BSSW home visits, observations, interviews with LEP and other school district program staff, and research on district LEP statistics provided evidence that the problem existed. County school district documentation showed that the LEP high school dropout rate was 6% (1 of 16 students), twice the rate of non-LEP students. District figures documented that the LEP high school annual grade retention rate was 5% (1 of 20 students), compared to 3% for non-LEP students. District documentation revealed that, in reading, only 1 of 4 LEP eighth graders scored above the 49th percentile on state tests. Documentation revealed that, in writing, fewer than 2 of 5 LEP eighth graders scored above the standard score on writing assessment tests, twice that of non-LEP students.

Causative Analysis

There are several causes for the problem in this district. LEP students are disinterested in school because they do not understand English or fit into the culture and often have socioeconomic difficulties. Teachers and staff are inexperienced in understanding other cultures and the

benefits of multiculturalism and bilingualism. Parents of Hispanic LEP students often have language difficulties, a low educational level, and their home cultures have led them to expect the schools to perform all aspects of education. This writer's own experience as an immigrant student from Puerto Rico, and later as a school counselor there, confirmed these difficulties and expectations. In Puerto Rican schools, teachers are solely responsible for children's education. Existing district dropout prevention programs make no special effort to identify and address language and cultural difficulties of LEP students.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

The problem of early school leavers is a national one for all ethnic groups and one of the most serious social problems in the United States today (Dupper, 1993). For Hispanics in general and LEP immigrant students in particular, it has reached epidemic proportions. While the dropout rate for Whites and Blacks decreased in recent years, in the two year period from 1990 to 1992, the percentage of Hispanics ages to 16 to 24 who had dropped out of school leaped from 30% to 50% (GAO, 1994). Non-English-language background young people were found to be 1.5 times more likely to withdraw from school before graduation than their counterparts from English-language backgrounds (Cardenas, Montecel, Supik, & Harris, 1992).

Yet immigrant students, especially Hispanics, are ever-increasing in numbers. U.S. demographics are changing with the most recent waves of immigrants coming predominantly from South America and Asia. Together with African-Americans, minority students already make up a majority of students in many school districts. This trend toward diversity in linguistic and cultural backgrounds is increasing (Lynch & Stein, 1987). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of Hispanic children in the U.S. increased by 2.2 million from 1990-1996. Hispanic students are twice as likely to drop out of school as white students, and a major factor in this statistic is poverty (Fernandez & Shu, 1988). Hispanic teens, especially girls, are more likely to attempt suicide than any other adolescents (Hispanic Kids, 1996).

The population of young Hispanic people in the U.S. is expected to grow by 61% in the next 15 years (Hispanic dropouts, 1995), "six times the national average" (Rendon & Nora, 1987/88, p. 79). Hispanics will be the largest minority group in the United States by the year 2010 and will comprise one of every five Americans (OERI, 1993). Although it was known in 1991 that minorities would comprise the largest segment of the American population by the year 2000, the America 2000: An Educational Strategy report prepared by the Bush administration virtually ignored minorities and neglected the vast differences in social, linguistic, and cultural characteristics of American students (McCollum & Walker, 1992).

The Hispanic unemployment rate is 10.2%. This is more than twice that of whites. A large number of the labor force not having a high school education could be a "disaster for the U.S." (Hispanic dropouts, 1995). A high school diploma has become a basic requirement for most entry-level jobs (Charney, 1993). Hispanic students at-risk need a closer bond between schools and parents and more positive role models to remain in school (ASPIRA Association, 1996). At-risk Hispanic students need early and continuing exposure, beginning in junior high school, to strong career possibilities such as apprenticeships in local businesses (Rendon & Nora, 1987/88). Shu (1988) found in an anlaysis of the national High School and Beyond (HSB) study that Hispanic students droped out at a much higher rate than other students, even when they achieved average grades.

The U.S. educational system has not served Hispanic youth well (Hispanic Policy Development Project, 1988). The President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans (1995) concluded that Hispanic-American students were at-risk, noted that bilingualism was erroneously treated as a liability in American schools, and warned that Hispanic educational attainment was in a "state of crisis" (p. 1). Hispanic students often read two or more levels below their grade placement (Duran, 1988). Hispanic high school students "receive little or no encouragement to stay in school" (Rendan & Nora, 1987/88, p. 80). Poverty and culture clashes create high levels of stress in

inner-city Hispanic youths who then drop out of school. They become bored with school and disinterested in continuing their education. They perceive themselves as failures and become extremely alienated from school (Rendan & Nora, 1987/88). A survey by the Educational Testing Service (Coley, 1995) found that Hispanic dropouts thought getting an education and a high school diploma were not important to success in life. These students did not feel in control of their lives. They felt that their futures were governed by external forces, including luck and chance. Although working in low-paying, possibly deadend jobs, they had high aspirations for the future (Coley, 1995). This despite the fact that America is "fast becoming a society in which the absence of functional literacy at a minimum of tenth grade level will preclude most people from an effective role in the world of work" (Ginzberg, Berliner, and Ostow, 1988, p. 4). The future for dropouts is often grim: they comprise nearly half of heads of household on welfare and half of the nation's prison population (Coley, 1995).

Frank (1990) found parent education level may be more significant than low socioeconomic status as a cause for dropout and that "the number of family stressors is significantly related to dropout" (p. 34). A poll by Telemundo, the Spanish-language television network, found that 46% of Hispanic adults placed responsibility for dropouts on parents who were not involved with their

children's education (Speer, 1993). In focus groups of black, Native American, and Hispanic parents, parent consultant Maria Reyes found that "Hispanics tended to leave their kids at the school doorstep and assume everything would be great" (Speer, 1993). Communication between cultures and efforts to involve Hispanic parents are paramount for student success, but must respect the parents' family values so as not to upset the often "delicate balance that allows them to survive" (Valdez, 1996, p. 1).

Mexican-American immigrant students, the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. Hispanic population, have particular educational problems, especially adolescents in migrant labor families. Besides the difficulties presented by these youths' work-dictated mobility and differences in language and culture, these students often come to the United States with a wide range of educational backgrounds, although most have studied only a few years in the Grades 1-6 (Romo, 1993). A study of four Mexican-American immigrant families by Commins (1992) found communication problems between home and school. These problems were due to the fears and barriers that immigrant families experience. The parents in all four families wanted their children to succeed in school but did not know how to help. A case study of a Mexican-American youth found that he and his family experienced a severely frustrating relationship in Chicago parochial and public schools. Despite the support of his family, Alejandro eventually dropped out of

high school. The study's author, Carger (1996), concluded school system obstacles bilingual and bicultural children face such as sterotyping, bias, and language difficulties, can defeat even strong family support.

Schools that try to involve Hispanic parents in their children's education are often unsuccessful due to several barriers. School efforts often interfere with parents' work. Parent self-confidence levels are often low. Parents have limited English proficiency and cultural differences get in the way of meaningful communication. Attitudes of teachers and administrators are not always helpful (Bermudez, 1994). Poverty is an important factor in parent involvement. The poverty rate for Latino youths is 35.2%, three times that of white youths (Children's Defense Fund, 1990). Yet, most school-based programs for working with families to help students succeed are aimed at middle-class families and have failed to take into account that economic factors of lower socioeconomic culturally diverse families often limit the participation of these families in their children's educational success (Salend and Taylor, 1993). Such factors as transportation problems, long working hours of parents, time conflicts, and childcare needs often prevent minority parent involvement in school meetings (Children's Defense Fund, 1990).

The Educational Testing Service survey (Coley, 1995) found that interventions are often limited. Only 39% of dropouts said that teachers, counselors, or other school

personnel tried to talk students out of leaving school, while 75% of families tried this same approach. Only 20% of parents contacted the school, usually those with sons at risk of quitting. About 20% of parents told their children that quitting school was all right (Coley, 1995). Rendon and Nora (1987) found that the majority of high school teachers do not have the skills to overcome Hispanic students' language difficulties. Schools also often do not expect much from Hispanic students, except trouble. These low and negative expectations often predictably result in student "failure, misbehavior, violence, and attrition" (p. 82). A shortage of bilingual personnel makes it difficult for school staff to determine the differing needs of Hispanic students (Plata, 1989).

There are four program characteristics essential to successfully involving students in dropout prevention:

1. Students must see school as relevant.
2. Academic success must be attainable and striven for.
3. Students must have a positive experience in school.
4. Schools must accommodate outside factors that shape and effect student interest and performance (Grannis, 1991).

Despite the recognized contributions of school social workers to the educational success of students, social workers are seldom consulted or involved in the formation and administration of dropout programs (Frank, 1990). Yet Dupper (1993) states that school social workers are in a position to provide leadership in developing more

comprehensive and effective dropout prevention programs. Current programs, Dupper argues, do not address the complex nature of the early school leaver problems. School social workers, with their unique knowledge of the family and community conditions these students face, can provide an equally unique first-hand perspective on what students need to stay in school.

The U.S. educational system is completely different from what immigrant Hispanic students are used to (Lynch & Stein, 1987). Language is the greatest barrier for Hispanic students. If they are lucky, a bilingual education program is in place for them, one that begins their education in Spanish. More likely, there is no program at all for LEP students or an English as a Second Language (ESL) program where most daily instruction is in English from a bilingual teacher or where students are "pulled out" for similar instruction. Research demonstrates the student's native language should be developed first to provide a basis for acquiring the skills for competence in a second language (Cummins, cited in Ortiz & Wilkinson, 1989). When students are not proficient in English language skills, they are put at risk of school failure because they cannot fully participate in either academic learning or other social and educational processes that help them to grow (Fradd & Correa, 1989). According to Adelman (cited in Florida Department of Education, 1987), LEP students who need ESL instruction but are immersed in English language instruction

"can be expected to experience academic difficulties" (p. 113).

For Hispanic/LEP students, the problem of early school leavers is at a crisis point. Each year countless thousands of these students' lives become forever limited as they abandon an educational system that refuses to adapt to their needs. Many will become a burden on society, when they could have become productive citizens contributing rich cultural, linguistic, and economic benefits to that same society. Common sense dictates that schools in general and dropout prevention programs in particular must change to prevent this loss.

The ninth grade is a critical time for Hispanic at-risk students: nearly 40% drop out before then and half do not finish the 9th grade (Coley, 1995; Cardenas, Robledo, & Supik, 1986). This practicum intended to change the lives of a small number of ninth-grade Hispanic/LEP students through using the arts, career options, and respect for the language and cultural traditions of Hispanic and other LEP students to motivate them. This practicum aimed to give these students a reason to take pride in themselves so they would stay in school, graduate, and even look to higher education to realize their full potential. This writer, as a bilingual, bicultural school social worker, was in a unique position to effect this change.

Chapter III

Anticipated Outcomes and Evaluation Instruments

Goals and Expectations

The goal of this practicum was that Hispanic/LEP students in the ninth grade would stay in school. As a result of the practicum, these students would have more access to resources that support school completion. They would have increased understanding of the benefits of graduation, and the dangers of dropping out, to success in life. Evidenced-based outcomes focused on increased school completion rates, grade level promotion, and higher scores on standardized school tests for reading and writing.

Expected Outcomes

The following outcomes were projected for this practicum:

1. At least 20 of 40 LEP students in the intervention will remain in their alternative dropout prevention program for the school year or until mainstreamed into the general 9th-grade curriculum. This outcome will be measured by program attendance records.
2. At least 20 of 40 students will be promoted to the next grade level (10th grade). This outcome will be measured by student final report cards.

3. At least 15 of 40 students will improve English reading skills by 10% or more. This outcome will be measured by scores on standardized tests administered in September and again in May.

4. At least 15 of 40 students will improve English writing skills by 10% or more. This outcome will be measured by scores on standardized tests administered in September and again in May.

Measurement of Outcomes

Outcome 1: Program attendance records were to be used to determine whether and how many of the participating LEP students would complete their alternative dropout prevention program, in this case, Senior Academy or the writer's program. The writer would collect this data at the end of the school year.

Outcome 2: School final report cards were to be used to determine how many of the participating LEP students were promoted to 10th grade. The writer would collect this data at the end of the school year.

Outcome 3: The writer was to obtain the reading scores of the participating LEP students on the standardized achievement test of reading given in September and again in May, for comparison.

Outcome 4: The writer was to obtain the writing scores of the participating LEP students on the standardized achievement test of writing given in September and May, for comparison.

Chapter IV: Solution Strategy

Statement of the Problem

The problem to be solved in this practicum was that Hispanic Limited English Proficient (LEP) ninth grade students were withdrawing early from school.

Discussion

The literature discusses many solutions used for dropout prevention. These approaches and programs center on building student self-esteem, motivation, and desire to achieve. They focus on small-groups, one-on-one mentoring, and involve parents and teachers. They also recruit Hispanic community organizations, universities, businesses, social workers and other human services professionals.

Developing motivation is a strong theme in the literature. In particular, Chau (1991) noted that social workers who wish to provide ethnic competent practice, must consider cultural values and norms as the key element in assessment and intervention. Chau argued that unique sociocultural conditions confront minority individuals. As a result, social work professionals should develop effective problem-solving programs and interventions by understanding their minority clients' situations and environments.

Individual motivation and desire to achieve can overcome a Hispanic student's academic and cultural fit problems. The President's Advisory commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans (1995) recommended that the federal government broadly disseminate the many effective model programs and intervention strategies that exist for dropout prevention and student motivation. In particular, schools and businesses should offer youth apprencticeships, mentoring, and career pathway opportunities for Hispanic students.

Group techniques and cooperative learning can create a sense of community for the student (Grafton, 1992). Counselors White and Grayson (1987) used arts therapies to enhance individuals' communication skills at all ages. They also used the arts to stimulate self-discovery and to create self-motivation toward problem-solving. The creative arts of drama, poetry, music, dance, painting, ceramics and other visual arts and crafts improve communication skills, create self-understanding, link individuals to the world around them and aid in problem-solving (White & Grayson, 1987).

Project Reach, an alternative school program for at-risk high school students used drama and log-writing components to achieve dramatic improvements in student retention and reclamation, including academic achievement and student self-respect (Heger, 1992). The 1990 multicultural education goals of the Board of Education of

the City of New York focused on motivating students to become more involved in the school environment. These goals included encouraging "students to take an active role in improving the quality of life for themselves and those around them" (p. iii).

Motivation also comes from students working together to understand and solve problems and to develop communication skills. Mutual aid support groups and psychological skills training are effective in increasing academic performance, building self-esteem, reducing student depression, and improving the ways youths function in their families (Franklin & Streeter, 1991). Communication skills are essential to success in school and life. Some community groups encourage talented Hispanic students to have and pursue aspirations by improving students' skills in writing, in speaking, and in interpersonal relationships (Sosa, 1990).

Involvement of parents, other adults, and the community provides a multi-pronged approach to Hispanic/LEP student success. Bermudez (1994) found that school interventions that are successful develop a communication network between home and school. One successful project also involved university trainers, local businesses, and school district staff. Teaming parents and teachers for student counseling and mentoring improves student academics and supports student goal-setting and goal achievement (ASPIRA

Association, 1996). Parent involvement and teacher qualifications are also factors in supporting effective second language learning (Cazden, 1992). Some Hispanic community organizations have created their own distinctive dropout prevention programs for at-risk Hispanic youth (Sosa, 1990).

Multi-dimensional approaches to the Hispanic dropout problem are working. Evaluations found that 5 of 6 comprehensive school-linked human services programs in a study had positive impacts on dropout rates, absenteeism, and academic achievement (U.S. Government, 1993). Culturally-sensitive professionals also have a strong impact on students' success. The role of educational and social service professionals is to empower Hispanic families with the skills they need to adapt and cope with the very different school system of the United States (Correa, 1989). Social workers and other professionals sensitive to Hispanic culture's unique values and beliefs provide culturally sensitive services needed by Hispanic parents and their children. "The primary purpose of assessing families should not be to diagnose problems and weaknesses; it should be to develop educational and support plans that match the families' values and cultural tendancies" (Correa and Tulbert, 1993, p. 262).

The literature had generated several important ideas for a local intervention. Successful Hispanic dropout prevention efforts work simultaneously at different levels,

supporting academic improvement with student interest-generating techniques and close involvement of adults who have a stake in student success. Hispanic community groups in the 1980s developed successful programs to improve at-risk students' academic achievement by focusing on cultural pride and family values (Sosa, 1990). These two components should be part of a local intervention.

Respect for Hispanic culture and utilizing the arts for self-discovery can also offer valuable intervention dimensions. To improve the academic success of all students, schools should adapt their processes to student cultures, according to the body of research known as cultural differences (Tobias, 1993). The creative arts can liberate individual motivation and self-discovery through communication that serves as a basis for personal pride and leads to personal achievement (White & Grayson, 1987). These authors worked with people of all ages, helping them verbalize their feelings and communicate in new ways through poems, songs, art, theater, and dance. "Within all of us there is a creative flow waiting to blossom and surge forth. This creativity often unleashes surprising discoveries [and] ultimately leads to the celebration of self" (White & Grayson, 1987, p. 13).

Elements of the ASPIRA Association's dropout prevention model for Latino students, the Teachers, Organizations, and Parents for Students (TOPS) Partnership Project, would be adapted to the intervention (ASPIRA, 1996). TOPS uses three

member support teams that include the student, a "coach" from school staff, and a parent/guardian. TOPS is centered on goal-setting, action steps to achieve goals, and short-term, doable goals. Community outreach is a priority, including such special activities as speakers, field trips, socials, and training sessions, and relies on mentors, volunteers, and support services. Hispanic professionals and other community members should be sought out to serve as cultural informants for the schools, acting as liasons between schools and families, interpreting cultural variables for the schools, and helping new families become oriented and adjusted to American schools (Brandenburg-Ayres, 1990).

Description of Selected Solutions

This writer was going to provide an 8½-month school dropout prevention intervention for a total of 64 Hispanic LEP at-risk students enrolled in two high schools, 44 of whom were at E. High School (14 in Senior Academy). Senior Academy is an academic alternative dropout prevention program for ninth-graders in the school district. There were 20 Hispanic LEP at-risk students at J. High School. This writer's plan was to create an intervention that combined the most needed and most effective features and goals of other dropout prevention programs specifically aimed at at-risk Hispanic/LEP youth. The intervention sought to increase student academic and personal motivation,

develop goal-setting and decision-making skills, increase parent involvement, and involve other adults from the community in the success of Hispanic/LEP students.

The intervention would start solely as an adjunct to the academic and other efforts of Senior Academy and was aimed at complementing and reinforcing the goals of this program. The writer planned to target the special language, cultural, and human services needs of LEP students, of which Hispanics were the great majority. Non-Hispanic LEP students would also be encouraged to participate.

This writer planned to incorporate strategies and techniques aimed at building student self-esteem and cultural pride. Career exploration and the arts were to serve as foci and tools. Mentors and role models from the Hispanic community were to be sought to support these aims (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 1988). Field trips to businesses and cultural centers were planned to enrich students and expand their horizons (Sosa, 1990).

The writer would act as facilitator, guide, and counselor in all meetings. She would also provide individual counseling as necessary throughout the intervention. She planned to bring in motivational/role model guest speakers from the Hispanic community. Class meetings were to include writing exercises, responses to speakers, and poetry writing.

Report of Action Taken

The intervention was conducted over the entire school year covering an 8½-month period plus preparation. The writer met weekly with a total of four groups, 64 students in all at two high schools, referred to as J. High and E. High. She met with Group 1, Senior Academy at E. High, all year and beginning February with Groups 2 and 3 at E. High for over four months. She met with the J. High group for three months in the Fall. The writer also met with parents at both schools and addressed several meetings of teachers and guidance counselors. Only Group 1 students were actively enrolled in the Senior Academy dropout prevention alternative program, although the students in the other three groups would have qualified for that program, since all were at risk.

Originally, the writer had intended to work only with students enrolled in Senior Academy, so that her intervention could be a suportive adjunct to an existing alternative academics program. The first change in the intervention came about when the LEP supervisor recommended the writer conduct the practicum at J. High School due to the high population of Hispanic students and the need for services to this group. The school principal had requested bilingual help for at-risk students.

The need for bilingual professionals in the high schools is great, as is the need for counselors for at-risk Hispanic and other LEP students. As a result, the writer

found that supervisors from her department and administrators at two high schools wanted her practicum to serve their students. J. High did not have an existing Senior Academy or other alternative academic program for at-risk students. Although this affected the intervention, the writer's first responsibility was to the school district. They had granted permission for the intervention and decided that she should include J. High in the practicum. Another change was that there would now be two schools in the intervention.

The writer made five important discoveries. First, a practicum of this size and duration meant many delays and seven weeks to organize after initial approval. This is because it needed the input and cooperation of many school district officials and teachers, and thus many meetings. Even with hindsight, preparation could not move much faster since nothing could be done until school started in August and the student participants could not be selected until they tested as eligible for LEP in September.

Second, it was more difficult to collect student permission slips for some high school students than for elementary students. The students at J. High School either forgot to give the permission forms to their parents, left the signed forms at home, or the students' were not in school when the writer went to the class to collect the permissions. However, the writer was prepared for this and telephoned the parents of all interested students who had

not brought in the necessary permission. Within a week, the writer had collected the missing permissions, sometimes by mail. The experience with the Senior Academy students at E. High was very different. All the students brought in their signed permission slips without followup by the writer. The Senior Academy program seemed to provide a good structural framework for making the students responsible.

Third, the writer found that in such a large school district, various events and clerical mistakes preempted some student meetings and misplaced student records prevented some of the students from being located in the Spring semester. This situation, in turn, prompted a search for new participants to augment the remaining students.

A fourth lesson was that these students needed counseling for problems and stresses in their lives as much as they needed help with academics. Related to this, the writer, a trained counselor able to quickly establish rapport with Hispanic students, adapted the intervention with her component of it focused more on what she knew best, counseling.

Fifth, interventions, like this one, should start very small and build gradually for years. This practicum was far too ambitious for the resources, time, and knowledge available about the participant students and their environment. Despite all the delays and changes that had to be made, the practicum achieved its outcomes and was helpful to the students and highly instructive to this writer.

Month 1, Week 1: As the preparation phase of the intervention began, the writer was transferred from the district School Social Work Department to the School Psychology Department, which coordinated LEP services. The writer's duties remained essentially the same as before, the only difference being that she had a new supervisor.

Despite laying the groundwork for the practicum about a month before the intervention began, preparation continued after proposal approval since permissions and support needed to be obtained from a variety of district administrators. The writer also spoke to all the high school guidance counselors in the district's various alternative education programs, at the request of their district supervisor.

Month 1, Week 2: Next the writer consulted with the LEP Program Director for advice. She also met with the Director of the Alternative Education Program to coordinate practical aspects of the intervention such as arranging meeting times with the students and learning details of Senior Academy. At this time, the writer also began contacting Hispanic community groups, artists, parents, teachers, and other professionals to obtain volunteers and guest speakers.

Month 1, Week 3: The writer next spoke to principals of both high schools. She received enthusiastic support from the principal of J. High School. She then had successive meetings with that school's Alternative Education guidance counselor, the four ESOL language teachers, and the

school's two bilingual aides. ESOL Teacher Mrs. C. recommended that the writer rotate the class periods during which she would be pulling the students out of their classrooms for the intervention group sessions. This was so the students would not miss the same subject each time they met with the writer.

The writer also privately met with Mr. J., the Alternative Education guidance counselor at E. High School. After meeting with this school's principal, the writer met separately with its two Senior Academy teachers, Mr. S. and Mrs. G., and with the ESOL teachers. The writer spent one period in each of the two Senior Academy classes to observe the students' attitudes toward their teachers, peers, and classwork. The writer noticed that many of the students were not interested in the classroom topics or seemed confused. Two students in one class had their heads on their desks and appeared to be sleeping. Many had difficulties with reading, writing, and spelling.

Month 1, Week 4: Meetings with administrators and supervisors produced helpful advice that caused this writer to reflect and modify or eliminate some of the extensive and overambitious intervention activities. Senior Academy teachers explained that their students were not given homework because many of the students worked full-time, could not do the homework, or would not do it. Therefore, in order to encourage student success in school, no homework is given in Senior Academy. They advised this writer to

take the same approach, so the book reports and other home assignments were cancelled for both groups.

Month 2, Week 1: The writer presented a Teacher Workshop/Orientation Session at each school to explain purpose and strategies of the intervention, gain teacher input, and obtain teacher volunteers. The teacher workshop produced only three teachers at E. High and six at J. High. All teachers attending expressed interest but none were able to overcome scheduling conflicts. Therefore, no volunteer mentors were obtained from the teachers.

The writer had to wait to select participating students after until all ESOL students in the district were tested for language category and eligibility to participate in the LEP program. The writer randomly selected 40 participants from LEP students enrolled in J. High School regular classes and E. High School Senior Academy. She divided the students into two groups of 20 to meet once a week for one class period each with the writer. These group sizes were unwieldy and would have been further divided into four groups of ten. However, this was not necessary due to attrition in attendance. The E. High Senior Academy group was reduced to 14 attending by the third meeting, so the missing six students were not tracked. The writer developed counseling topics and lesson plans for each student meeting.

This writer was able to meet individually with parents of 15 of the students in the two original groups. Some were interested in volunteering but work schedules prevented

this. Therefore, no parent orientation was held. Instead, the writer explained the purpose, goals, and plan of the practicum. She explained how parents could support student success at home, with or without direct school participation. She emphasized that a supportive home environment can be just as powerful as school involvement. She also answered parent questions.

Month 2, Week 3: The writer first met individually with Group 1 Senior Academy students at E. High and students at J. High to establish rapport before they met in groups. Participant students at both schools actively listened to the writer's presentation, generally had a positive attitude, and were receptive toward the intervention.

Month 2, Week 4: In the first group meetings, the "ice-breaker" student orientations, the students met each other for the first time. Each student shared information about where their families were from and problems they had adjusting to the new culture. In both groups the students were cooperative, and gave positive responses.

Month 3, Week 1: The writer presented a session on self-esteem at both schools. She demonstrated the exercise on the blackboard, writing something she liked about herself and would not change and something she did not like and wanted to change. Each student did the same on cards and handed them in anonymously. The writer listed the two categories on the board and used this to begin a discussion on self-esteem and define it as a group.

While students in both groups shared a common Hispanic background, there were a number of differences between the two schools and the needs of their respective students. The students at J. High School were more recent arrivals to the United States. Most had only been here from a few months to three years and were still experiencing cultural adjustment problems, including adjustment to the English language. They often indicated sadness at leaving extended family behind and had difficulty adjusting to the American school system. These students were experiencing a poor cultural fit in their new home.

After the first group session, a male student from J. High spoke privately with the writer, describing the dilemma of his bicultural life. He said he felt he lived two lives -- one at school and one at home -- and these two lives were creating conflicts for him. He said that at home, he had previously been a good son, actively involved with his family and their church. He was also enrolled in honors classes for math and science. However, his academic performance was suffering because of the time he spent with his school friends. He said he wanted to do better in school, but he needed to spend time with his friends. Since his family had moved from Cuba to the U.S., his parents had both worked long hours. He did not like being a "latchkey kid" and wished his mother would be there when he got home every day as she was in Cuba. He said his parents had little time to spend with him.

He was aware he was hanging out with the "wrong crowd" at school, but he did so, he said, because he felt lonely and he desperately wanted to be accepted and make friends. He felt that his values had changed and said he was getting in trouble more, even at church. He said he could no longer participate in church activities because he had developed a negative attitude. He said, as bad as things had been in Cuba, he would prefer to go back because at least there he did not feel so lonely and out of place.

Meanwhile, the E. High School students often had parents born in the U.S. or their parents were from Mexico and South American countries and the students had been born U.S citizens. Part of their problem was that many were transient, moving with their families to follow the fruit and vegetable picking seasons. The students from both schools were experiencing academic problems and both groups were at-risk of dropping out of high school. However, the E. High students did not have language and other related short-term cultural adjustment problems. Some of their problems were negative attitude, alcohol, pregnancy, and drugs. One E. High student said she had a drinking problem and another female student said she was pregnant. A male student said he would probably become a drug dealer, like his uncle, because his uncle earned a lot of money.

Most of the E. High students said they would like to complete high school, but did not see this happening. They seemed to have the potential and desire to graduate, but

said they had little motivation at home. Many of their parents were migrant workers and the families traveled from one state to another. J. High students said they were not sure if they would graduate because they had difficulties with language, cultural adjustment, making friends, and the American school system. Most were recent arrivals to the United States from a variety of Hispanic countries and Puerto Rico.

This and following sessions had the dual purpose of first helping students to understand that sharing concerns could help them deal with problems and, second, to broach important issues in a non-threatening manner so students would feel comfortable approaching the writer with individual needs or to receive counseling outside of class.

The district director of school psychologists had earlier advised this writer to emphasize the counseling and self-discovery aspects of the practicum and leave the academics to the teachers. She explained that the students would respond better to the counseling and arts activities if they were not mixed with academics. Furthermore, she said these students needed counseling.

After the first few meetings with the students, the writer agreed that the counseling need was strong and this advice was also taken. One of the writer's duties as a school social worker is to address attendance problems with both students and their parents. Frequent absences by students in both of the writer's groups led the writer to

talk with students individually, call some parents, and make home visits. From the conversations and visits, the writer found that a variety of socioeconomic problems and needs plagued these students. Situations ranged from parental neglect to transportation problems. Some of the students had divorced single parents who left for work before the students left for school, so were not there to make sure their children attended school. Sometimes a parent was in jail or had other legal problems.

Other students had medical or other needs that were not being met, often due to poverty, language difficulties, and cultural differences. Often parents did not know where to go for help or had transportation problems. Sometimes, they kept students out of school to have their help as translators at social agencies. There were more serious problems, as well. The writer found some students were physically or sexually abused. This often left the students confused and too embarrassed to attend school. For these and related reasons, many of the students in both groups had very low self-esteem. Finally, some students, especially those with language difficulties, simply did not feel welcome in their schools and avoided going whenever they could. For example, E. High had a very large Hispanic student population, but did not have a single Spanish-speaking staff person in the school front office, Student Affairs office, or in guidance.

Clearly, the need for counseling and bilingual services was great. Thus, the writer decided that focusing on improving the students' self-image would help them to attend school more so they could have the time they needed to learn. Group exercises were used, as originally planned. However, writing assignments were scaled back and focused on exercises in self-esteem, confidence, goals, and relating to others. Some arts-related activities were kept to support self-discovery as an aid in improving self-image.

Month 3, Week 2: In the next session, the writer suggested to students, despite their difficulties, they should try to think of dropping out of school as not an option. To explore the students' perceptions and feelings about staying in school as opposed to dropping out, the writer asked each group to list the worst results of both staying in school and dropping out. Both groups said the worst results of dropping out were getting pregnant, "getting hooked on drugs," getting in trouble with the law, and going to jail. E. High students added dropping out could mean working in the fields like their parents or not finding a job at all. Both groups said the worst that could happen if they stayed in school were fights, trouble with the principal, and failing the grade.

Month 3, Week 3: The following week, a Cuban-American woman and third year law student spoke to students about her experiences and difficulties with high school and college. Her topic was: How I Chose a Law Career and How I Got There.

She told the students that at one time she did not know if she wanted to graduate from high school. She said even after two years in college, she still did not know what her career would be. She discovered her goals only after actively exploring careers and trying some related classes. After the speaker's presentation, the writer listed on the blackboard the steps the speaker had taken to find her career and to achieve it. Each class then brainstormed careers, goals, and necessary steps to achieve goals, with an emphasis on the role of education.

Most of the students actively listened to the presentation, although in the J. High group, one student was distracting the others and was asked to leave. Both of the Senior Academy teachers were present at the E. High presentation. One student asked the speaker what made her decide to stay in school. She said she knew her options would be limited if she quit and her father was very supportive of her going to college. However, she said that her parents could not afford to pay for college so she worked very hard and won a track scholarship. She also worked and received loans and grants for college. She said she decided to become a lawyer after reading about different careers and then trying a course in criminal law. One student asked how long it took to become a lawyer and another asked how to get scholarships. Several students said they would like to become lawyers.

Month 4, Weeks 1-3: The writer had asked the bilingual aides to serve as mentors for the students, in lieu of teachers. However, they could not do so because they were involved in an annual ESOL program audit in December and January. Final exam testing from the Fall semester, teacher work days, and holidays in January preempted meetings with the students for three weeks. In addition, the writer was given additional responsibilities on a bilingual team with school psychologists and speech therapists to assess pre-kindergarten children with limited English.

It was also in January that the writer was unable to find the J. High participants in the practicum. School records showed them as no longer attending the school. The writer immediately contacted colleagues for advice. They said the students at J. High were very transient. She was told by staff that, due to financial problems, their parents often moved from one apartment to another so the students kept changing schools.

The Senior Academy teachers at E. High noted that their students were also somewhat transient. Some were mainstreamed back into regular ninth grade classes, either for good academic performance and behavior, or because of lack of progress. Others became pregnant, dropped out to work, or were suspended or expelled. Still others were migrant students who left to follow the picking seasons in Mexico and Texas and later returned to the writer's state for the same reason.

Following this advice, the writer recruited more students for the intervention. At E. High, the teachers offered a total of 33 referrals of at-risk LEP Hispanic students to help rebuild the student groups. The writer, while repeating the process of interviewing referred students and getting parental permission, continued to meet with the remaining original students. Several of the activities were scaled down or postponed. Also, the lack of mentors meant that this writer was responsible for all aspects of in-class meetings.

Month 4, Week 4: The writer met with the original E. High group, now eight students. The writer related school success to social skills such as students helping students, parents and teachers helping students, teamwork, etc. The writer began by posing the question: How do we make friends and why are friends important? She put her own answers on the board and asked the class to add their ideas such as being respectful, listening, non-violent conflict resolution, etc.

This group had not met in over a month due to holidays and the students were not behaving well. Also, they did not seem to take seriously the negative consequences of dropping out of school. During the exercise they acted childish, giggling and not paying attention. However, when the writer asked the students if they would prefer to go back to their regular classrooms, they settled down, although one student was asked to leave.

By the end of January, the writer rebuilt the Senior Academy Group 1 at E. High to 10 students and added 14 students in a new Group 2 and 16 students in the new Group 3. All of the new students were at-risk candidates for Senior Academy, although none were enrolled in that program. That was mainly because of space and teacher limitations: there was only one Senior Academy "class" with two teachers who taught the four main subject areas. This week the writer met for the first time with Groups 2 and 3. These were "ice-breaker" or "getting to know you" sessions. Mrs. B, an assistant Senior Academy teacher, was present. This may have inhibited student reactions to the presentation.

The writer explained the purpose of the groups and gave students a list of Student Responsibilities and Rights, along with a related worksheet. Both groups were only somewhat responsive, although most of the students actively listened. The writer discovered that rounding up the students from several different classrooms far away from her portable classroom, even with the help of student runners supplied by the guidance office, reduced her time with the students.

Month 5, Week 1: The following week, Group 1 did not meet due to testing. Students in Groups 2 and 3 were asked to say the worst that could happen to them if they stayed in school. This question was met with complete silence in

Group 2 and several students in Group 3 said "I can't think of anything." When asked what was the worst that could happen if they dropped out, they answered: get bored, have no money, have no job, get in trouble with the law, get pregnant, "cannot go out and have fun," and "my parents will be on my case."

Month 5, Week 2: In the next Group 1 Senior Academy session, seven students attended. The writer explained an exercise entitled "Who Am I." This exercise used a worksheet and was a moderately successful lesson. All the students actively participated and listened to each other. R. led the discussion. Two of the seven students immediately volunteered that they did not know who they were. This activity was well-accepted by the students even though they had difficulties talking about themselves. The writer noted many of the students also had difficulty spelling simple words such as "friendly" and "highly-liked."

Group 2, with 9 of 14 students in attendance, actively listened but was very quiet. They filled in the Who Am I worksheet and relaxed after writing about themselves. Some of the students gave each other positive feedback about what they had written. Some told others that the negative characteristics they had written about themselves were not true. They said these students were being too hard on each other.

In Group 3, 10 of 16 students attended. Some complained that they did not like talking about themselves

and others said they had nothing positive to say about themselves. Several were nervous and did not want to participate. However, as the period progressed, the shy ones followed the lead of the more talkative.

Month 5, Week 3: In Group 1, five of the eight students were there for the Personal Reflection activity. The writer used a list of open-ended questions to stimulate student reflection. These questions began with: "My parents have influenced my values by ____." Some questions asked about how the students felt about themselves and others asked who else influenced them. One girl was not willing to share with the group what she had written about her relationship with her father; she said it was too personal.

The group tried to shift the focus from themselves. They made mostly negative comments about themselves. In Group 2, 10 of 14 students attended, displaying a compliant and positive attitude toward the exercise. Although the most quiet group, they were beginning to write positive comments about themselves. Only four students in Group 3 attended that day. A student said this was one of several lunch periods and many students routinely left at this point, skipping school for the rest of the day.

Month 5, Week 4: In the next session, Group 1 had six students attending for a discussion of My Rights and Responsibilities in the Group and also, Self-Esteem: My Personal Shield. They were asked to name: (a) a person I admire, (b) things I want to learn well, (c) things I like

about myself, and (d) things I do well. The group then discussed individual answers with very active participation, frank self-disclosure, and a generally positive attitude. This group, the "oldest" of the three, was developing its own group dynamic. Groups 2 and 3 continued to move slowly. These students were still getting to know each other and this writer and were not yet volunteering much information about themselves.

Month 6, Week 1: The next week the students were asked to draw or write about themselves: what they like best, what they like physically, and talents. In Group 1, four students attended. They listed drawing, acting, cooking, and writing poetry as talents they had or would like to have. All four said they did not participate in any community activity. Two girls said they did nothing with their parents, one because the mother worked long hours and the father stayed out late. One boy said he went fishing with his father and a girl said she helped her mother take care of her niece. Three of the students said their parents would not come to a night activity at the school if invited. Three of the four students said they did not attend church. Three also said that both Spanish and English were spoken at home. The students in Groups 2 and 3 gave similar reactions. Both of these groups were still slow to participate and reticent to discuss feelings.

Later that week, E was absent due to an in-school suspension. The activity was "Quienes Somos?" (Who Are We?), which focused on the students' cultural background and discovering inner strengths. The students discussed their full names, the names they preferred to be called by, and the cultural meaning of their names. They also discussed racial identity, their parents' birthplaces, their religion, and the languages(s) they spoke. They were asked about their favorite songs and types of music, people they admired, and something that each one wanted to achieve in his or her lifetime. This was the best group session so far, but not due to the cultural activity.

The experiences of new group members made everyone became more open about their lives and problems, providing a lot of self-disclosure from the students in all three groups. In particular, a new member in Group 1, R., shocked the other students when he declared he was 17 and a single father of twin girls whose mother died in childbirth. The other students were amazed as R. said he was taking responsibility for his daughters, who live with their maternal grandparents. He was attending school full-time and working full-time.

Month 6, Week 2: The following week all three groups continued the previous discussion on personal problems and experiences. Some of the students in groups 2 and 3 continued to become more open and animated. Another new

student, D. joined Group 1, and was very quiet. R. and Y. were still on suspension and absent. The writer discussed the purpose of the group for the benefit of the new students. One student said he might be mainstreamed from Senior Academy back to regular classes due to a negative attitude. He said that he would still come to the writer's group if he was mainstreamed. M. said he had had a negative attitude in the Fall semester, but that he decided to change that himself after the winter holidays. A., whose father had a drinking problem, contributed that "Senior Academy is what you make of it."

Month 6, Week 3: In this meeting, the groups discussed "My Talents." Although students in all three groups were willing to list talents such as art, acting, cooking, and writing poems, many said they had no talents. M. said that he could not practice his drawing because he was in Senior Academy and no longer able to go to art class. The writer said she would try to arrange for him to attend art classes. Most of the students who said they had talents could not elaborate on these talents and did not talk about them with enthusiasm.

A student who was not in a gang had been accidentally killed in a gang-related incident at the school and Crisis Intervention counselors were present at the school. A., in Group 2, was absent because she had been very close to the dead student. M. in Group 1 said he knew the dead student

very well. The writer talked to the groups about "Dealing With Grief." M. said he could easily have been accidentally killed when he used to stay out late at night with his friends in dangerous places. Instead, his uncle, who was in jail for selling drugs, had told him not to hang out with those kids or M. would end up in jail "like me." Fortunately, M. took his uncle's advice. He also started doing better in school and his relationship with his parents improved.

Month 6, Week 4: This week, the writer discussed "Inner Strengths" as resources. She talked with students about what inner strengths or qualities they saw in each other that would help them graduate, achieve their goals, and be successful in life. Each group member gave and received feedback from the others. Some inner strengths named were personal talents such as drawing, a sense of humor and respectfulness toward others, honesty, not being influenced by peer pressure, and "being one's own person." Group 1 had a core of four students who have been meeting together since October, and the other four students had also been there for about two months so they were very supportive of each other. Groups 2 and 3 and were getting to know each other, so they did not volunteer much. Only a few students from these groups had anything positive to say about themselves or others. These students were also often absent.

Month 7, Week 1: The students discussed "Autobiography - Who Are You?" Group 1 had only three students present. One girl was on out-of-school suspension for fighting in school. She fought another student for making a negative comment about her friend, the student killed in the gang-related violence. The writer did not allow Y. into the group because he had not completed his classwork, even though his Senior Academy teacher had given him extra time.

In Group 2, there was an interesting occurrence with a new addition to the group, N. She asked if the group was like peer counseling. One student told her it was not because "peer counseling is more like a class... with no confidentiality. Here we have confidentiality." Another boy added that members of the writer's group were allowed to speak in Spanish, whereas the Senior Academy teacher who led the peer counseling group did not understand Spanish and became upset when it was used. Two other female students in Senior Academy, Z. and I, heard about Group 3 and asked to join.

Month 7, Week 2: The writer had five students attending Group 1 in the next meeting. One girl was suspended for three days due to an attitude problem and excessive absences. R. was playing the class clown, so he was sent back to his regular class. The writer admitted the two new girls to Group 3. The writer discussed setting goals and achieving them. The three groups talked about

graduating from high school as a long-term goal and the steps to get there. The writer emphasized that it was good to set short-term goals as steps to achieving long-term goals.

Month 7, Week 3: In the next meeting, the writer continued the discussion on setting and achieving goals. The new students in Group 1 asked the writer to share some things about her life, so she did this in the other groups as well. Many of the students talked about the possibility of going to a technical high school. Group 3 was interrupted when a teacher, guidance counselor, and police officer came to search a book bag of one of the students for a compact disc that another student had accused her of stealing. They did not find anything. The writer asked the students to bring a list of things they like about themselves to the next meeting.

The writer next discussed the topic "What do I like About Myself?" with the groups. Few of the students had written anything on paper, despite several prompts the writer had given them. These prompts included "list five strong points about yourself -- emotionally, intellectually, and in your personality." Therefore, the writer discussed these guidelines again in class. This time she asked for verbal, rather than written responses. However, only about one-half of the students in Group 1 responded, while only about one-third in Groups 2 and 3 offered any kind of response.

Month 7, Week 4: Guest speaker Ms. A., a bilingual school psychologist intern, spoke to the students about her experiences in high school and college. Group 1 had an outstanding session, with seven students present, despite numerous problems. Two of the female students announced they were suspended for five days for fighting and two of the boys were referred to student affairs, but were not suspended. The speaker told the students that she was Cuban-American, born and raised in the United States, but her parents were from Cuba. She said she did not initially like high school, but overcame this by getting involved in school activities. She explained that when she went to college she did not know what she wanted to study. She described the work involved in getting her bachelor's and master's degrees and what a bilingual school psychologist did. The students asked how long it took to get a degree in psychology. They also asked if the work paid well and Ms. A. stated that it did, but that her major satisfaction was she was doing something she enjoyed.

The students asked where the speaker got the money for college and she said from student loans and help from her parents. She explained that her boyfriend was studying to be a doctor. To reinforce staying in school, the writer had asked Ms. A. to ask each of the students why they wanted to finish school. M. said he wanted to make money. N. said she wanted to make her mother proud. E. said she was not sure she would graduate. A. said she wanted to attend

college. R. said he wanted to finish high school so he could get a good job and support his twin children.

This session was highly successful because the students gave their full attention to the speaker and seemed genuinely interested. They asked many questions and were active participants. At the end, Ms. A. asked the students if they would like her to come to future sessions and the students said yes.

In Group 2, Ms. A. explained that she was motivated to become a school psychologist by her high school psychology teacher because he made the class very interesting. The students actively listened and some asked questions. They wanted to know what the duties and responsibilities of a school psychologist were. Those in Group 3 asked Ms. A. about scholarships. A new student, C., asked the most questions.

To make up for the week lost by Spring Break, the groups met a second time that week. Beginning with that session, Ms. A. attended and assisted the writer with all discussions. The topic was "My Assets and Liabilities: Things I Like and Things I Want to Change." All of the students said they needed to improve their schoolwork and homework and get to school on time. Students said their difficulties with schoolwork came from falling asleep in class. They said they fell asleep because the teachers were boring. The writer role-played a student who was going to drop out of school and asked the students to tell her why she should not drop out.

The most vocal student was the newcomer, C., in Group 3. He said if the writer dropped out, she might be homeless like some of his friends. He said he had friends who had dropped out, but who had to sneak into school to eat and to bathe in the restrooms because they were homeless. They were homeless because, after dropping out of school, their parents kicked them out of the house. N. said she did not believe this, but others said C.'s story was true. They also knew friends who were kicked out of their homes when they dropped out of school.

C. added if a student dropped out he might have to sell drugs because he could not get a job, and might end up in jail. A student in Group 2 said he wanted to graduate from high school because he did not want to be like his brothers and sisters. He said they were married and had lots of children, but could not support their families well. He wanted to be able to support his family.

In Group 1, Z. was suspended from school for using profanity in the classroom and Y. was absent finishing an assignment for a class. F., another new student, joined the group. Recently, more and more students, some in Senior Academy and some not, had been hearing about the writer's groups and requesting to participate. Although, it would not be possible to measure outcomes for the recent latecomers to the groups, the writer did not turn them away. They seemed to be there because they wanted to talk or listen to others about their problems. In addition, new

students tended to stimulate the groups. Individual students were increasingly seeking out the writer for private talks outside the classroom.

Month 8, Week 1: Many students were absent from all three groups for the Mexican/Hispanic holiday of Cinco de Mayo, a total of 460 absent in the whole school. The topic was "Establishing Short-term Goals," and was presented by the writer and Ms. A. They discussed examples of short-term goals. In Group 1, the four students present were focused and immediately referred to their worksheet list of things to improve and selected one as a short-term goal. One student said he had to work on his short temper. Another said he had to come to school every day. The two other boys listed graduation from ninth grade as their goal, and one said he wanted to attend the technical high school. Most of the students in Group 2 decided that graduation from ninth grade was a good short-term goal. They said to accomplish this they needed to be on-time to school, and not be absent. In Group 3, the writer observed as Ms. A. presented the topic. The students listed their two-week goals as: (a) getting to school on time, (b) finishing schoolwork and homework, (c) attending school, and (d) completing the ninth grade.

Month 8, Week 2: Group 1 did not meet due to a teacher work day. The writer used this time to get to know the students in Groups 2 and 3 better. In Group 2, two students said they knew they had failed ninth grade, yet were unsure

about attending summer school. They said that school was boring and did not challenge them academically. They related that they just went "through the motions," counting the minutes and class periods until they could leave. None said they were involved in after-school activities, but would not say why.

In Group 3, several students also said they would fail ninth grade. G., a 16½ year-old-student, said this was his third failure of ninth grade, but he would not be attending summer school because he was going to Texas. Despite these events, many of the students said their parents wanted them to attend school so they could have a better life than their parents. These students said they did not participate in school activities but did not reply when asked why. They also said nothing when asked if the school tried to motivate them to participate. The writer told them she noticed students seemed to congregate by race, meaning white student groups and Hispanic groups. There are almost no African-American students at the school. The students said this was true, but it was not due to prejudice, but because they could understand each other better.

Ms. A. presented the topic of "Knowledge is Power." In Group 1, the students were restless and had trouble focusing on the topic, perhaps since it was so close to the end of the school year. Several of the students were distracting the others and the writer said that if they could not pay attention, they should leave. Only one of the nine students

present left. Surprisingly, this was M. who had been with the group all year and made a consistent contribution. In Group 2, one of the students said he had been kicked out of the house by his father, but could come home in a week. His guidance counselor and the writer suggested he attend Job Corps until he could go home.

In Group 3, a student stated "the more you know, the more power you have," but also said high school was not for everyone. The writer said that even if high school might not be for everyone, education was. She emphasized that it was important to have either a high school diploma or a G.E.D., at the minimum, to have a good job and a chance at a good life. She added that knowledge gives the power to accomplish daily needs. She said that education helps get an apartment or house, understand a lease, balance a checkbook. She emphasized it was important to know how to read and write and understand what the words meant when signing a contract.

Month 8, Week 4: A local American businessman and poet, Mr. D., read his poetry to the groups and discussed poetry with them. He explained that he had once been so bored in high school he skipped a lot of classes in tenth grade and got into trouble before he got back on track. He also said he was very upset for some reason in his senior year, but could not remember why, and nearly ran away from home in the middle of the year. If not for the cold weather, he said he might have gone through with it, but was

glad he did not. He led each group in writing a group poem entitled "I Am" (Yo Soy) simultaneously in English and Spanish, with each student contributing a line. The students in Groups 2 and 3 were quiet and somewhat reserved, but contributed lines to the poem. In Group 1 the students became very animated and excited about the finished poem. One student asked about college and Mr. D. said he had only a low "B" average by graduation because he had "goofed off" too much. However, he said that he had been accepted to three very good colleges because he was very active in after-school activities and as a community volunteer.

A Puerto Rican-American poet, Ms. B., also read her poetry that week to the three groups. She said she had grown up as an "army brat" in Hawaii and California and never felt like she fit in anywhere. She did not discover writing poetry until she was in college for her bachelor's degree in journalism. She said after she received her B.A. she worked as a reporter and editorial assistant for a few years. Then went back to college at night for her M.B.A. so she could make more money. Since then she had worked as a financial writer and analyst, but mostly preferred to write poetry and read it at coffeehouses. She said her uncle was a well-known poet and playwright in New York City and she was going to move there and become more involved in poetry. She showed the students a book of her uncle's plays and poems.

Month 9, Week 1: The writer met one final time with each group for a pizza party. She asked the students what they had learned from the sessions. Most said they were happy to have someone they could talk to who would listen and try to help them. Some said they liked individual topics like setting goals. Many said they liked the speakers. Several asked if they would see the writer again and if they could come and talk with her about their problems. The writer said she would be available to them as part of her regular job as a bilingual school social worker; if they needed help, they should just ask their teacher or guidance counselor to contact her.

In summary, there were indicators that these students could be reached and helped to stay in school. They became excited by the speakers: college students, professionals, and poets who stimulated student interest and reinforced the writer's intervention goal of staying in school. In addition, the growing popularity of the groups, with increasing numbers of students asking to join them, indicated student interest in talking about some of the issues in their school and home lives, as well as the major issue of staying in school.

However, the dominant theme in this experience was that these students do not relate well to school or to American students. For a variety of reasons, they did not see school as relevant to them. These students did not participate in after-school activities such as sports and clubs. Finally,

attendance for these students was a big problem, both in regular classrooms and even in the writer's groups. Furthermore, they did not understand that they needed to attend summer school if they failed a grade. They seemed completely disconnected from the school and what was required of them to be promoted, although many were.

Finally, the writer was distressed by the generally low self-esteem and low expectations these students had for themselves. Students need to believe in themselves in order to be motivated to do well academically. Although they wanted to stay in school and graduate, they did not see themselves as having the potential to do so. They seemed to think they were predestined to drop out and no matter what they did, this would happen. They seemed stuck between cultures, often unable to relate to either their Hispanic background or to their American home.

The most important overall effect of this practicum was the ninth graders in the intervention felt there was someone there to listen to them other than the teachers. Futhermore, this writer is Hispanic, like the participating students and someone who could relate to their experiences of frequently moving from one country or state to another and having to repeatedly adjust to new peers and/or a new culture. This writer also understood the language and culture adjustment difficulties their parents were experiencing.

Perhaps most important, the students saw this writer and the other speakers as Hispanics who stayed in school and went on to successfully complete higher education. Thus, she was a strong positive example and a role model for them. As a result, some of the students began to embrace this writer's primary message which supported that of the district's Senior Academy alternative program: whatever the student's problems, leaving school without graduating was not an option.

The main problem of Hispanic students in E. High School's Senior Academy was that their families were transient. These students had little continuity in their lives to begin with, so that leaving school was not perceived as a serious disruption. Most of these students were born and raised in the United States, but many were still having difficulties because their parents were migrant workers. Although they already knew the American language and culture, about half of these students moved around a lot, from state to state, following the picking seasons.

Their problems centered around low self-confidence. They needed counseling support, in general and for their academic goals. They were rootless, always starting over. They accepted this writer as a friend and support person. They gave her the respect due a teacher, but they could not relate completely to their teachers because there was always the element of judgement involved, manifested through grading or disciplinary measures for disruptive behavior.

They trusted this writer because she was non-threatening. Therefore, they were willing to open up more and share problems.

Many times poor results in academics for these students have to do with other socioeconomic problems which manifest as alcoholism, drug addiction, pregnancy, and so on. They need an adult they can trust, someone to talk to and give them options. At the non-Senior Academy school, J. High School, the students in the practicum saw the writer as a "comfort zone" and told her things they needed to talk about but could not share with anyone else. These students were often new arrivals from Spanish-speaking countries and Puerto Rico, so they also appreciated being able to confide in someone in Spanish. The practicum students at both schools were encouraged to look at school differently through this writer's help. It is hoped some realized that dropping out would ultimately hurt them.

Chapter V: Results

Results

The goal of this practicum was that Hispanic/LEP students in the ninth grade would stay in school. The writer hoped, as a result of the practicum, these students would have more access to resources that support school completion and increased understanding of the benefits of graduation and the dangers of dropping out of school. The initial solution strategy selected was a blend of proven dropout prevention programs that emphasized motivation, goal-setting, and involving adult mentors (parents, teachers, community). In particular, the arts were to be used to stimulate student self-discovery, career exploration would encourage graduation and higher education, and both of these approaches would aim to build student self-esteem and cultural pride. In addition, a number of academic projects such as journals, book reports, and a research project were originally scheduled to support academic skills.

However, the writer received new information and advice from colleagues regarding student behavior and attendance problems early in the intervention. This information was supported by socioeconomic needs and problems discovered in the writer's own talks with students and their parents. Thus, the academic projects were curtailed in favor of counseling support for motivation and self-discovery.

The following outcomes were proposed for this practicum:

1. At least 20 of 40 LEP students in the intervention will remain in their alternative dropout prevention program for the school year or until mainstreamed into the general ninth-grade curriculum. This outcome will be measured by program attendance records.

This outcome was met. Data collected from school records showed that 38 of 64 total students, over half, remained in either their Senior Academy program or the writer's alternative intervention, or both (see Table 1. This figure is much higher, 38 of 49, when the numbers are adjusted to reflect the fact that only 5 of the original 20 students at J. High actually showed up for the weekly meetings.

2. At least 20 of 40 students will be promoted to tenth grade. This outcome will be measured by student final report cards.

This outcome was met. Results revealed that over half were promoted to tenth grade (see Table 2). In this case, if only the 5 students from J. High who attended group meetings were counted, the outcome was still met at 28 of 44 students, again well over half.

3. At least 15 of 40 students will improve English reading skills by 10% or more. This outcome was originally to be measured by scores on standardized tests of reading achievement. However, the writer was given erroneous

Table 1: Student Completion of Dropout Alternative Program

School & Program	Began	Stayed	Dropped Out	Transferred	Admin. Error
J. HIGH (Writer's Program)	20* (5)**	0	3	0	17
E. HIGH					
GROUP 1 (Senior Academy)	14	8	0	6	0
GROUP 2 (Writer's Program)	14	14	0	0	0
GROUP 3 (Writer's Program)	16	16	0	0	0
TOTALS:	64	38	3	6	17

* Number referred

** Number that actually began

Table 2: Student Promotion to Tenth Grade

School	Began Intervention	Promoted	Retained in Grade	With drew	Not Enrolled (98-99)	Promoted to 12th Grade
J. HIGH	20* (5)**	17	0	3	0	0
E. HIGH						
GROUP 1 (Senior Academy)	14	10	2	0	2	0
GROUP 2 (Eligible Sr. Acad.)	14	7	2	0	4	1
GROUP 3 (Eligible Sr. Acad.)	16	6	5	0	4	1
TOTALS:	64	40	9	3	10	2

* Number referrred

** Number that actually began

information, since these tests are not administered in ninth grade. Therefore, the writer measured student improvement in reading English through their success or failure in meeting school district benchmarks for their grade.

This outcome was met. By this measure, 16 of 39 students who actually attended the intervention sessions met the benchmarks (see Table 3).

4. At least 15 of 40 students will improve English writing skills by 10% or more. As in Outcome 3 (above), the writer had to substitute benchmarks for writing English as the measure.

This outcome was also met, using the same data as in Outcome 3 since reading and writing skills are combined in benchmarks (see Table 3).

Discussion

The most interesting result of this practicum was that all four of the outcomes were met, despite extraordinary changes necessitated by external forces. On the one hand, the full achievement of the outcomes and the outcome-related success of the practicum might be considered limited, since the four groups did not all begin at the same time nor did they meet for the same duration. Another limitation is that it is unknown to what extent the intervention was responsible for the outcome-related success of the groups. Finally, the necessary modifications of intervention activities were many, so it is difficult to quantify the

Table 3: Student Improvement of English Reading and Writing Skills

School	Total	Met Benchmarks	Did Not Meet Benchmarks
J. HIGH	20* (5)**	0	20
E. HIGH			
GROUP 1 (Senior Academy)	14	9	8
GROUP 2 (Eligible Sr. Acad.)	14	4	10
GROUP 3 (Eligible Sr. Acad.	16	3	10
TOTALS:	64	16	48

* Number referred

** Number that actually began

impact that particular components such as the speakers and few arts-related activities had on encouraging the students to remain in school and in their alternative programs. Also unknown is the direct impact the intervention had on student abilities to read and write, although the indirect effect of the students discussing topics like goal-setting and interacting with two poets may have provided added stimulus toward reading and writing in English.

Indeed, it is also suspected that the writer's intervention may have had considerable indirect effect on academics through its meetings which functioned much like group counseling sessions and classes in exploring the arts and various professions. In other words, the student participants in the four groups knew that they had a safe, non-judgemental place they could go to every week to talk about their lives and their difficulties and obstacles related to staying in school, as well as getting a regular "shot" of motivation and self-esteem from their peers and the writer. This may have helped them succeed in their academic subjects.

Counseling and peer pressure are valuable tools for motivating students. In particular, group counseling where peers give feedback on each other's attitudes, can be a powerful force in shaping behavior. A study of Hispanic fourth grade students by Charney (1993) showed that group counseling and behavior contracts with rewards resulted in significant improvements in students' self-image, ability to

meet long-term goals, academic success, and later dropout prevention. It appears that the shift to a counseling emphasis in the practicum was beneficial to the participating students, as well as more reflective of the writer's skills, education, and experience than either the academic or arts emphasis.

Furthermore, Comas-Diaz (1990) reported that immigrant Latina women adjusted better to life in the United States when therapy was used to manage conflicts. The authors emphasized that bilingual/bicultural therapists were instrumental in assisting Latinas to resolve a number of concerns. There is no doubt in the writer's mind that the Hispanic students in the four groups were more comfortable discussing their lives with the writer than with other adults because the writer was a fellow Hispanic, one who encouraged the use of Spanish along with English, and obviously reflected respect for Hispanic culture. Moreover, the writer was seen by the students as a counselor, someone who listens and tries to help, not as a judgemental authority figure. A Hispanic bilingual school psychologist intern received the same acceptance as the writer.

Social workers can play a unique role in helping at-risk high school students stay in school (Franklin and Streeter, 1992). Because of their close contact with students and their families, social workers can be assessment specialists for the schools, as well as dropout program specialists who contribute to designing dropout

prevention programs that address the needs of the young people they know so well. Moreover, social workers can help tailor individual programs to the needs of the main types of dropout students in the school or area such as Hispanic students, students in gangs, transient students, female students coping with pregnancy, etc.

Previously, the writer had worked primarily with elementary grade students in her role as bilingual school social worker. However, in the practicum, the writer experienced first-hand the consequences of gang-violence, student pregnancy, and pervasive low self-esteem in the lives of high school students. As the leader of the intervention groups, the writer developed a good idea of what these students needed to stay motivated and stay in school, mainly counseling support. They needed to know that someone cared, that there were adults who would listen to them and help them.

Recommendations

First, immigrant, transient, and other LEP/Hispanic students should be provided with a cultural orientation of the school, its opportunities and rules, as college students are given when they first arrive on campus. Otherwise, these students feel alien and unwelcome.

Second, alternative programs for at-risk students should bring a steady stream of speakers to Senior Academy and other classrooms, especially successful minority

speakers. The students in the intervention related especially well to the speakers.

Third, recreation is good for the students, such as field-trips. However, students in at-risk programs should also have field trips to career-relevant places such as a technical or performing arts high school; the practicum aimed for this, but this objective was too ambitious for a first-time intervention. They should also be taken to visit colleges, and businesses, so they can see the results of graduating high school and the further opportunities graduation brings.

Fourth, alternative programs aimed at helping at-risk students should include a counseling component other than guidance counseling. These students need someone to talk to about problems at home, in school, and on the streets, someone not judgmental and preferably bilingual/bicultural they can relate to and who will serve as a role model.

Fifth, schools should try to discover why these students do not see education as relevant to their lives and look for ways to make attending and graduating high school more relevant.

Sixth, individuals attempting to replicate this intervention should be prepared to spend the first year getting to know district and school administrators, guidance counselors, at-risk program teachers, parents, and community leaders to lay a solid foundation for helping at-risk Hispanic LEP students. Interventions should focus on

counseling, start with a small group at a single school, and learn what works and what does not.

Seventh, persons conducting interventions like this one should be aware that these students need literacy and motivation, as well as counseling.

Eighth, although not performing well academically, these students claimed they were not challenged by their classes. This seeming contradiction should be explored. When "poor" students say they are falling asleep in class because they are bored, these students may not see school as relevant to their lives.

Ninth, there should be at least one full-time bilingual school social worker trained in counseling, or a bilingual school psychologist, assigned to those high schools with large LEP/Hispanic populations. This professional should train bilingual aides, teachers, parents, and other adults and volunteers in how to facilitate support groups and peer counseling groups for at-risk students. These students need to believe in themselves if they are to graduate. They need an understanding adult to listen and try to help, without judging them as parents and teachers often do.

They need a counselor, someone interested in them. Guidance counselors are not enough. They are concerned mainly with student academic and behavioral problems and guidance counselors have large caseloads. These students need counselors who will take an active interest in understanding student problems and needs. They need

counselors who can take the time to gain the students' trust. Finally, these students need counselors who know their culture and speak their language, if the school district is committed to reducing the high Hispanic and other L.E.P. dropout rate.

Dissemination

The writer will first distribute the results of the practicum to the administrators, supervisors, guidance counselors, principals, school psychologists, other bilingual school social workers, and colleagues in this very large school district who have shown interest in the practicum. Results will also be distributed to Hispanic community, business, and professional associations such as the Hispanic Council of Needs and Services, the Hispanic Professional Women's Association, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and the Puerto Rican Business Association. The writer will also make the practicum results available at the next annual Multicultural Conference and Social Worker Conference. Finally, the writer will inform key professors at the local community college and state university that copies are available to them.

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